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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH AFM NGUYEN DUC HUNG:  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACTION PLAN, PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT

Ref: A. Hanoi 312; B. State 29193; C. EAP/BCLTV O-I 17-05;  
[D](#). Hanoi 284

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (SBU) The Ambassador met February 18 with Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung at the latter's request, and their discussion focused on the Prime Minister's proposed June visit to the United States and the religious freedom "action plan." On the PM's visit, AFM Hung requested protocol treatment commensurate with the PM's status as "number two" in Vietnam and urged the USG to nail down the dates of visit. In the June 20-30 timeframe, the PM wants to spend five days in four U.S. cities and also plans to visit Canada. AFM Hung also reiterated that the GVN hopes to conclude a number of agreements prior to the PM's visit, such as the Framework on Economic and Technical Assistance and maritime and agricultural agreements, and is considering adoption, Article 98 and IMET agreements.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary, cont'd. On religious freedom, AFM Hung said that the Foreign Minister gave the "go ahead" to work on an exchange of notes with the United States and that the GVN is putting together its draft. AFM Hung responded with some confusion to the Ambassador's presentation of Ref B, questioning the use of the term "action plan" and asking how many notes would be exchanged and whether the notes would be duplicates of each other. Ultimately, AFM Hung agreed that the Embassy and the MFA's Americas Department would work closely to ensure that the notes ultimately exchanged reflect each side's views and concerns. AFM Hung raised in familiar terms his Government's concerns about both Nguyen Huu Chanh and a recent open letter from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (CIRF) to the Secretary on the religious situation in Vietnam. The Ambassador described briefly his upcoming travel to the Central Highlands, outlined the purpose of S/P Inboden's February 20-24 visit to Vietnam, urged the GVN to both allow MIA investigation and recovery operations in the Central Highlands and give permission for a medevac helicopter to operate in support of site activities and pressed the GVN to give favorable consideration to imprisoned Mennonite Le Thi Hong Lien. He also thanked the MFA for its help in allowing an Amcit detainee to see his family, sought assistance in facilitating the upcoming Codel McHugh visit and passed a nonpaper requesting the GVN return to the United States the Great Seal from the former Saigon Embassy compound, now on display in a museum in HCMC. End Summary.

Prime Minister's Visit

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with Assistant Foreign Minister and Americas Department Director General Nguyen Duc Hung February 18. Pol/C and U.S. Desk Director Nguyen Hoanh Nam were also present. AFM Hung opened by noting that the Ambassador plans to travel to the Central Highlands provinces of Lam Dong and Dak Lak February 25-March 1. The Ambassador said that he wishes to travel to region before Easter and added that, during his meetings with local officials and religious and civic leaders, he plans to deliver a familiar message: that the United States values highly religious tolerance and that the United States supports the territorial integrity of Vietnam.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Turning to his prepared notes, AFM Hung said that, during his February 4-5 discussions with NSC Senior Director Michael J. Green (Ref A), he had touched on "various aspects" of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's proposed visit to the United States in June. AFM Hung noted that he would like to start discussing "details," first among them the "protocol level" of the PM's visit. The GVN understands that the United States only has "State" and "non-State" visits, but nonetheless hopes that the PM's visit will be an "official" one. Pressed for further details by the Ambassador, AFM Hung explained that this means the GVN desire is for the visit to be "formal, with all the protocol and other measures commensurate with the PM's status as

number two in Vietnam." This will be important for Vietnamese "domestic consumption," as the Vietnamese people will "watch closely" to see how PM Khai is welcomed and treated. For example, "whether he has an honor guard," AFM Hung explained.

14. (SBU) On the issue of timing, the Prime Minister wishes to travel to the United States for five days during the June 20-30 timeframe. He also plans to travel to Canada, and, in order to nail down the Canadian half of the trip, the GVN needs to know soonest when the PM will be welcome in the United States. The Prime Minister would prefer to visit the United States first. His "preliminary itinerary" contains stops in four cities over five days, including: Seattle, where he will meet with the Governor, State legislators and local Vietnamese-Americans and "sign the contract" for four Boeing 787's; Washington, D.C., where during his two-day stay he wishes to meet the President, APNSA Hadley, Secretary Rice and Members of Congress whom the PM is "close

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to," such as Senators McCain, Kerry, Hagel and Lugar; in addition, the PM hopes to participate in a number of agreements' "signing ceremonies;" New York City, where he will meet with "financial and insurance company leaders, such as the head of New York Life" and deliver the keynote address to the U.S.-Vietnam Business Forum; and Boston, where he will meet with "intellectuals" and give a speech at Harvard University, Hung said.

15. (SBU) As for the agreements the GVN would like to conclude by the time the Prime Minister visits - with the PM himself "witnessing the signing ceremonies" - AFM Hung listed the Framework Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation (which Hung noted is in its final clearance stage); the Maritime Transportation Agreement (which the Ambassador said will be the subject of discussion during a Maritime Administration team's visit in March); and the Agreement on Agriculture and Related Fields. The GVN "hopes to finalize" these three agreements before the PM's visit. The GVN is also "considering" agreements on adoptions, Article 98 and International Military and Education Training (IMET), AFM Hung added.

16. (SBU) Responding to a number of AFM Hung's points, the Ambassador noted that, regarding protocol, the White House controls these matters and every President has a different style. We will convey the GVN's desiderata to Washington, but it is also important for the Vietnamese Embassy to begin discussions with the White House and the Department. The same is true for the visit's timing. On the subject of the 787 purchase, the Ambassador said that, in light of China's recent agreement to purchase 70 787's, the sooner Vietnam can get its own order into the pipeline, the better. China's large order could impact Vietnam's own delivery timetable and it may not be wise to wait until the Prime Minister's visit to Seattle to seal the deal, the Ambassador observed. Finally, in preparation for the visit of the Prime Minister and his delegation, the Ambassador asked the MFA to provide us as soon as possible with names and dates of birth (and passport numbers, if feasible) to begin our necessary visa-related security check procedures.

Religious Freedom Action Plan

17. (SBU) Turning to another subject of discussion during the Dr. Green visit, AFM Hung noted that both sides had discussed exchanging diplomatic notes to address religious freedom issues. The Americas Department received instructions from the Foreign Minister to "go ahead" and is currently working on the contents of a note. AFM Hung expressed his hope that the Embassy and the Americas Department, "working together," will be able to conclude this matter "by early March."

18. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that resolving this issue will be a key element in creating the right atmosphere for the Prime Minister's visit. Continuing, he said that he had received a green light from Washington to hand over to the GVN the list of priority actions (Ref B) which would form the heart of our proposed action plan. Furthermore, while we are not yet authorized to present to the GVN the remaining text of the action plan (but will do so as soon as possible), we are able to read the full text of the proposed action plan to GVN officials (Ref C). Following his presentation to AFM Hung, the Ambassador observed that all of the elements both sides have discussed as important are contained within our draft action plan. The Embassy recognizes that time is short and looks forward to moving this process forward.

19. (SBU) Expressing some confusion, AFM Hung said that "there appears to have been some misunderstanding" regarding the action plan. The GVN understands that there will be "an exchange of notes," but "does not like" to have these notes

refer specifically to a "work plan" or "action plan." The Ambassador replied that, at the GVN's request, the term "work plan" was replaced by "action plan." That said, the important thing is not nomenclature but rather how the two sides reach their desired goal. AFM Hung nodded in agreement and returned to the question of notes, asking "how many notes are going to be exchanged" and "will they be different from each other?" The Ambassador responded that, while the specifics of the notes have yet to be discussed, there will be two notes, and one note will have to acknowledge the receipt of the other. The Ambassador and AFM Hung agreed that, in the days ahead, both sides will need to exchange their thoughts and opinions about their respective texts, and AFM Hung urged the U.S. side to "take into consideration" Vietnam's concerns.

#### S/P Inboden Visit

110. (SBU) Continuing on the subject of religious freedom, the Ambassador noted that S/P staffer and DRL/IRF Ambassador Hanford associate Will Inboden will travel to Vietnam next week for meetings with Government officials and religious, particularly Protestant, leaders in HCMC and Hanoi. The purpose of this visit will be to understand the religious freedom situation in Vietnam as well as possible, and, to that end, S/P Inboden will likely meet with a number of house church leaders. The purpose of these meetings will only be to gather information. Inboden will not visit Vietnam to negotiate the action plan, the Ambassador added. AFM Hung said that the MFA had instructed the External Relations Office in HCMC to assist in arranging meetings for Dr. Inboden.

#### CIRF Recommendations to S

111. (SBU) AFM Hung expressed concern about the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom's (CIRF) February 8 letter to the Secretary, which recommends putting People's Committee Chairs of problem provinces on visa watchlists and providing USD one million for religious freedom and human rights programs in Vietnam. The GVN understands that the CIRF is independent and that its recommendations do not constitute a State Department decision, but the CIRF letter "irritated" Vietnamese public opinion and "certain law enforcement agencies." AFM Hung urged the United States to "be careful," because "such news can spoil things." Responding to the Ambassador's question about whether AFM Hung had seen the CIRF's reaction to the Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism, he said that he had, but that the CIRF recommendations could still "cause some problems." The Ambassador rejoined that Vietnam's failure to issue the implementing regulations for the Ordinance on Religion left it open to criticism. AFM Hung replied that he had attended a meeting February 17 chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan, and said it seemed that the regulations will be out "in a couple of days."

#### Nguyen Huu Chanh

112. (SBU) Responding to AFM Hung's request for "more information" Nguyen Huu Chanh (the self-described leader of the "Government of Free Vietnam" (GFVN)), the Ambassador reiterated points he had made two weeks before in a conversation with Vice Foreign Minister Le Van Bang (Ref D). On the specific issue of the GFVN's office in Washington, the Ambassador remarked that opening an office is not illegal and, as far as we could tell, would have virtually no real significance in terms of damaging GVN interests. AFM Hung expressed his understanding but noted that some in his Government "exaggerated" Chanh's activities. Hung urged the USG to "give serious consideration" to Vietnamese public opinion and take some measures to prevent Chanh from carrying out his activities, which could include "something" on the occasion of the Prime Minister's visit. The Ambassador responded that, because of societal and other differences, there are some issues in which one side is not prepared to do what the other wishes. When it comes to the Prime Minister's safety and security, however, there will be no higher priority. That said, we cannot stop individuals from speaking out or perhaps demonstrating, even if it is during the PM's visit.

#### Codel McHugh

113. (U) The Ambassador noted that a three-person delegation of House Members will travel to Vietnam next week to discuss issues related to the fullest possible accounting of MIAs. However, while their plans are to visit Vietnam and Laos and then return to Vietnam, they only received single-entry visas from the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington. The Ambassador asked for the MFA's assistance in addressing this issue.

#### Fullest Possible Accounting

114. (SBU) Our inability to carry out MIA investigation and recovery activities in the Central Highlands remains an issue, the Ambassador continued, as does the matter of allowing a medevac helicopter to operate. The Ambassador urged the GVN to take steps to resolve these concerns.

#### Lien Case

115. (SBU) On the subject of imprisoned Mennonite Le Thi Hong Lien, the Ambassador pressed the GVN to consider favorably her case, noting that she needs medical treatment, not imprisonment. AFM Hung promised to look into her situation.

#### Amcit Detention

116. (SBU) Returning to another subject raised during the Ambassador's February 1 meeting with VFM Bang (Ref D), the Ambassador thanked the MFA for its assistance in allowing the family of imprisoned Amcit Bao Phat Tang to visit him.

#### The Great Seal

117. (SBU) The Ambassador concluded by raising the issue of the Great Seal of the United States, which was part of the former Embassy compound in Saigon. Noting that the Seal is now on display in a museum in Ho Chi Minh City, the Ambassador said that, as part of the 1995 property agreement between the United States and Vietnam, the Seal should have been returned. A GVN decision to return the Seal would be a welcome and highly symbolic gesture. Its display in a museum as a trophy of war is not appropriate for the current positive state of bilateral relations. If the Seal's return could be quietly arranged, it would be greatly appreciated. The Ambassador handed AFM Hung a nonpaper to this effect.

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